UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/677
12 November 1997
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

Fifty-second session
Agenda item 45

THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRM AND LASTING PEACE AND PROGRESS IN FASHIONING A REGION OF PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 12 November 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the pleasure to transmit to you a copy of a letter dated 10 November 1997 from His Excellency Mr. Emilio Álvarez Montalván, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Nicaragua, the text of which is self-explanatory.

I should be grateful if you would have the above-mentioned letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 45.

(Signed) Enrique PAGUAGA FERNÁNDEZ
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Letter dated 10 November 1997 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua addressed to the Secretary-General

I should like to refer to the report of 11 September 1997 (A/52/344) which you submitted during the current session under agenda item 45, "The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development", and, in particular, to its paragraph 16.

In this connection, I should like to offer the following clarifications of some of the issues referred to in that paragraph:

(a) The Republic of Nicaragua and the Republic of Honduras delimited the frontier between them in the Gulf of Fonseca in 1900 and are currently uniting their efforts to mark the frontier by means of buoys;

(b) Nicaragua's rights in the Gulf of Fonseca outside the zone delimited with Honduras have not yet been determined;

(c) Nicaragua has not concluded any agreement to share fishing rights in the Gulf of Fonseca.

I trust that the above information can be taken into account for the preparation of a clarification of the statements made in your report.

(Signed) Emilio ÁLVAREZ MONTALVÁN
Minister for Foreign Affairs

CONTENTS (continued)

		Paragraphs	Page
	E. Education and training	43 - 46	13
	F. Specific target groups	47 - 55	14
V.	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS	56 - 60	16
VI.	ASSISTANCE BY MEMBER STATES AND OTHER DONORS	61 - 68	17
VII.	CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS	69 - 72	18

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 51/30 B of 5 December 1996, the General Assembly, (a) taking note of Security Council resolution 1071 (1996) of 30 August 1996, in which the Council, inter alia, welcomed the agreement of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at Abuja on 17 August 1996, which extended the 1995 Abuja Agreement until 15 June 1997, established a timetable for implementation of the Agreement, adopted a mechanism to verify compliance with the Agreement by the faction leaders and proposed possible measures against the factions in the event of non-compliance, (b) having considered the report of the Secretary General (A/51/303), the Assembly, deeply concerned about the adverse effects of the protracted conflict on the socio-economic development of Liberia, particularly the attacks against civilians, the looting of property and the destruction of infrastructure throughout the country, as a result of the outbreak of hostilities on 6 April 1996, and the urgent need to restore peace and stability to facilitate economic recovery and the rehabilitation and reconstruction of basic sectors of the country, and (c) noting with concern that the lack of adequate logistics and security guarantees from the Liberian factions continues to impair the delivery of relief assistance, particularly in the areas not yet under the control of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), urged the factions and their leaders to establish conditions essential to the socio-economic development of Liberia by honouring their commitments to cease all hostilities and disarm their combatants according to the timetable agreed to at Abuja on 17 August 1996.

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly called upon all States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to continue to provide Liberia with technical, financial and other assistance for the repatriation and resettlement of Liberian refugees, returnees and displaced persons and the rehabilitation of combatants so as to facilitate the restoration of peace and normalcy in Liberia. It reiterated its appeal to all States to contribute generously to the Trust Fund for Liberia established by the Secretary-General, inter alia, to assist ECOMOG to fulfil its mandate and to provide assistance for the reconstruction of Liberia.

3. Further, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to mobilize all possible assistance within the United Nations system to help the Liberian National Transitional Government in its reconstruction and development efforts, and to undertake, in close collaboration with the authorities of Liberia, an overall assessment of needs, with the objective of holding a round-table conference of donors for the reconstruction and development of Liberia. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-second session on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution, and decided to consider at that session the question of international assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia.

4. Pursuant to the above-mentioned resolution, the present report describes the activities of the humanitarian assistance community in Liberia in fulfilling the goals set forth in the resolution, and other developments since the issuance of the previous report of the Secretary-General.

II. OVERVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE EFFORTS

5. In his previous report (A/51/303), which was issued in the aftermath of the April-May 1996 hostilities in Monrovia, the Secretary-General pointed out that the outbreak of violence had compelled the humanitarian assistance community in Liberia (i.e., the United Nations agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and donors) to re-examine its humanitarian assistance programmes and their impact on the situation in Liberia. The consequences of the crisis, coupled with the forced evacuation of humanitarian staff and the loss of 489 vehicles and other valuable assets, seriously restricted humanitarian activities in the country. Consequently, the humanitarian community, its activities coordinated by the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office in Liberia, decided to limit operations to targeted life-saving activities until a safe working environment had been restored.

6. The magnitude and suddenness of the humanitarian disaster in Monrovia presented a serious challenge to the humanitarian community. Approximately 46 per cent, or 362,000 of Monrovia's estimated 780,000 inhabitants, had become displaced, a situation exacerbated by the extensive looting of humanitarian assets. Some of those attempting to leave Liberia for other countries of the subregion were turned away by countries already overburdened by Liberian refugees. Since access to the hinterland was limited for reasons of insecurity, the humanitarian assistance community focused its efforts on the Monrovia area, making do with whatever resources had been spared from looting and destruction.

7. While relief work in and around Monrovia was being carried out, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator continued to negotiate access to the hinterland with the various factions. Upon reaching a successful outcome of the negotiations, a series of assessment missions were conducted to the most affected areas. Relief organizations were thus able to gradually expand their activities to reach towns and villages that had been inaccessible since the outbreak of the conflict among the factions.

8. The advocacy of humanitarian issues on behalf of persons in distress was also vigorously pursued by the humanitarian assistance community. In collaboration with aid organizations and donor countries, the Humanitarian Coordinator developed an advocacy strategy by preparing and issuing joint statements on specific events that threatened the integrity of humanitarian activities. This included the issuance of international and national press releases, media interviews, in-house newsletters and radio reports. This strategy was aimed at disseminating and projecting the views of the international aid community so as to restore calm, and to gain access and provide assistance to the needy.

9. The above-mentioned efforts were particularly successful in gaining access to the starving civilians held captive in Bomi county. On 8 July 1996, a mission led by the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office found hundreds of starving people, including emaciated women and children, held against their will by one of the warring factions in order to attract food aid to its area. The publicizing of this reprehensible act by means of the international and national media helped to secure the release of the civilians,

as well as access to the area by humanitarian workers. Similarly, the massacre of civilians in the township of Sinje, Grand Cape Mount county, in late September 1996 was reported by Médecins sans frontières and verified by a mission led by the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office, which subsequently brought the massacre to the attention of the international community.

10. The attention of the General Assembly was drawn in the previous report of the Secretary-General to the fact that 30,000 people in the city of Tubmanburg, Bomi county, had been cut off from relief assistance owing to continued instability and fighting. After eight months of persistent negotiations with faction leaders at all levels, an assessment mission comprising United Nations agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations was able to access the besieged city of Tubmanburg on 7 September 1996. The humanitarian community discovered first-hand the tragedy that affected civilians trapped by factional fighting: a quick survey of the nutritional situation in Tubmanburg disclosed that 82 per cent of the children in the area were severely malnourished. The response of the humanitarian community was quick. United Nations organizations, as well as international and national non-governmental organizations (Médecins sans frontières, World Vision International, Action internationale contre la faim, PMU-InterLife, the Liberia National Red Cross Society and Home for Old People) collaborated closely in order to save the lives of the severely malnourished children, adults and elderly.

11. By the end of September 1996, access had been gained to Grand Cape Mount county to the west of the Bomi Highway and a month later to Robertsport in the same county. The dire humanitarian situation in the area led OXFAM, World Vision International and Concern Worldwide to establish feeding centres, while Médecins du monde started up mobile health care services.

12. All successful efforts were made against a background of repeated harassment and abuse by the factions against civilians and representatives of the humanitarian assistance community. The civilian populations in several areas were denied freedom of movement and subjected to harassment, and their meagre food reserves, standing crops and personal belongings were either destroyed or forcibly taken by the fighters. On 17 October 1996, a 17-member joint United Nations/non-governmental organization humanitarian team on a mission to Grand Cape Mount county was taken captive at gunpoint, detained and its equipment and supplies looted by fighters. On 28 October 1996, food and non-food items in warehouses, vehicles and other resources belonging to the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran World Service were looted and their staff were harassed and detained in Phebe, Bong county. A shooting incident on 31 October 1996 at the Executive Mansion (the Presidential Palace) created further difficulties for humanitarian activities, giving rise to increased incidents of harassment and robbery of relief workers in the interior until ECOMOG brought the situation under control.

13. With the commencement of the disarmament and demobilization exercise on 22 November 1996, the humanitarian situation in Liberia improved significantly. The steady deployment of ECOMOG to new areas, the establishment of a network of disarmament and demobilization sites by the United Nations and the consequent decrease in incidents of armed banditry up-country, enabled relief work to be

resumed in hitherto inaccessible areas. The nature of the humanitarian assistance provided also broadened from one of addressing life-threatening human suffering to trauma counselling and the repair of basic roads and bridges and other infrastructure so as to facilitate the expansion of assistance programmes after the rainy season.

III. SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS

A. Revitalization of the peace process

14. In the period under review, the peace process in Liberia was revitalized, owing in part to the determined efforts of the international community. The hostilities in Monrovia in April-May 1996 had made the prospects for sustainable peace very bleak. However, intensive diplomacy by regional and bilateral parties to put the peace process back on track culminated in the adoption of the expanded Abuja Agreement on 17 August 1996 and the installation of Ruth Sando Perry as the Chairperson of a restructured Council of State on 3 September 1996. Efforts to create a cohesive Council, however, remained difficult because of mistrust of the Council among the faction leaders and the continuation of hostilities in the interior among their armed supporters. The precarious ceasefire and disengagement of forces received a further setback as a result of the shootout in the Executive Mansion on 31 October 1996. While an escalation of hostilities was averted owing mainly to the restraint exercised by the members of the Council and the rapid deployment of ECOMOG to key strategic points of Monrovia, the incident served to aggravate existing rivalries and suspicions within the Council of State.

15. It is to be recalled that, after the signing of the Abuja Agreement in August 1996, the ECOWAS Chairman and President of Nigeria, General Sani Abacha, had requested the Secretary-General to work with ECOWAS to provide the necessary assistance and support in the processes leading to the conduct of free and fair elections in Liberia. Accordingly, the organizations of the United Nations system present in Liberia acted in concert to ensure the full implementation of the revised Abuja accord. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia actively participated in various formal and ad hoc committees and structures established to monitor and promote the various facets of the Agreement, inter alia, through the Mediating Committee composed of representatives of ECOWAS, ECOMOG, the Liberian National Transitional Government and members of the diplomatic community in Liberia. In addition, the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) continued to chair the Ceasefire Violations Committee and participated in the Disarmament Committee which undertook joint investigation and verification missions.

16. The United Nations system also played a very important role in the electoral process. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided, in conjunction with other bilateral and international organizations, critical technical assistance to the electoral authorities while UNOMIL worked with ECOWAS to ensure adequate coordination in the electoral process. In addition to deploying hundreds of electoral observers, UNOMIL supplied logistical assets and resources that constituted a key element of the transportation and information

infrastructure supporting the registration and polling process. Those efforts facilitated the holding of generally free and fair elections on 19 July 1997.

B. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

1. Disarmament and demobilization

17. International and regional attempts at brokering an agreement for the disarmament and demobilization of the parties to the civil war in Liberia had in the past faltered, largely owing to a lack of commitment by the concerned parties. Planning and resource mobilization was at an advanced stage when fighting broke out in Monrovia on 6 April 1996 and paralyzed those activities. Once the expanded Agreement of August 1996 established a new schedule of implementation for the peace process in Liberia, the United Nations resumed planning for a revised concept of operations for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and revived institutional arrangements and structures in September 1996. A campaign to sensitize the Government of Liberia to the process was also immediately initiated with it.

18. To advance the process, the Demobilization and Reintegration Task Force was revived under the chairmanship of the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator. Its composition was widened to include more representatives of concerned national and international organizations. As a matter of priority, the pre-April disarmament and demobilization plan was reformulated to take into account the new schedule of implementation for the peace process as well as the lack of resources, caused by the extensive looting, for carrying out the demobilization and reintegration exercise. A revised disarmament and demobilization plan was adopted in mid-November 1996 and subsequently submitted to the Council of State and the Mediating Committee by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The approved plan was a consensus document agreed upon by all parties. In the document, the Demobilization and Reintegration Task Force adopted a policy of "one person, one arm" in order to lend credibility to the exercise. While that policy initially met with objections from the factions and the Government, it proved to be an effective way of collecting as many arms as possible during the disarmament process.

19. The disarmament and demobilization operation began on 22 November 1996, as envisaged in the expanded Abuja Agreement of August 1996. Despite an acute lack of resources, particularly in terms of logistical capacity and staff, the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office and its partners were able to respond and begin demobilization promptly in all 10 selected sites. It is gratifying to note that 95 per cent of the demobilization staff were Liberians, a fact that indicates the substantial and determined involvement of the Liberian population. Both national and international staff worked under extremely difficult conditions, with poor subsistence and accommodation facilities. Furthermore, other agencies and programmes of the United Nations system, including The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO), and several national and international non-governmental organizations provided vital support to the demobilization programme.

20. By 9 February 1997, which marked the end of the official demobilization period, 21,315 fighters had been demobilized, comprising 16,759 adult males, 250 adult females, 4,239 male children and 67 female children. The number of demobilized fighters was slightly higher than that of those disarmed since child fighters were demobilized without turning in a weapon. Factional affiliations were as follows: National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), 11,553; United Liberation Movement of Liberia, General Alhaji Kromah's wing (ULIMO-K), 5,622; Liberia Peace Council (LPC), 1,223; United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, General Roosevelt Johnson's wing (ULIMO-J), 1,114; Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), 571; and Lofa Defence Force, (LDF), 249. After 9 February, ECOMOG continued to disarm combatants and collect weapons in areas where the exercise had not been carried out for logistical reasons. As a result, an additional 132 ex-combatants were disarmed voluntarily in remote locations in Liberia during subsequent months. The cumulative total of arms and ammunition recovered and duly verified by UNOMIL rose to 10,036 weapons and 1,246,024 rounds of ammunition. In addition, ECOMOG collected 3,000 weapons and 150,000 pieces of ammunition through cordon-and-search operations.

2. Bridging and reintegration programmes

21. Recognizing that dissolving the warring factions alone would not consummate the peace process, the United Nations and its partners designed a reintegration programme for the former combatants. As a first phase of that programme, the humanitarian community in Liberia, with the European Union, UNDP, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the International Labour Organization (ILO), WFP, UNICEF, WHO and the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office, as the principal players and supported by a large number of national and international non-governmental organizations, launched quick-impact projects to bridge the gap between demobilization and the implementation of long-term reintegration programmes. Those bridging projects were labour-intensive and community-based and covered such activities as public works (repair of roads and bridges, health facilities, schools), small-scale enterprises (agriculture, fishing, cottage industries, cooperatives), skills training (blacksmithing, carpentry, masonry), primary health care services (community-based training in health and sanitation, as well as disease surveillance), counselling and civic education. Although the bridging programme was aimed at the demobilized combatants, war-affected civilians also participated and benefited from it.

22. The bridging programme was aimed at sustaining the success of the disarmament and demobilization exercise. Bridging activities provided an immediate alternative to the ex-fighters and to their communities, thereby building community support for the exercise and assuring individual fighters of financial and material support in the wake of the loss of their means of livelihood through violence. They are also aimed at laying the foundation for a sound rehabilitation programme, breaking the factional chain of command, and contributing to efforts to promote a political environment and national reconciliation conducive to the holding of democratic elections.

23. A Bridging Operations Task Force, consisting of donors, United Nations agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations was formed; chaired by the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office, the Task

Force provides policy-level advice on and oversees the bridging programme, and ensures adherence to agreed guidelines and principles among key partners engaged in the funding, execution and implementation of bridging projects.

24. By 30 June 1997, when the bridging programme officially ended, it had provided short-term employment or training opportunities for more than 30,000 war-affected persons, of whom approximately half were former combatants. The Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office channelled US$ 3.2 million from the United Nations assessed peacekeeping budget and a contribution by the United States of America to the United Nations Trust Fund of US$ 0.52 million to United Nations implementing agencies and national and international non-governmental organization partners supporting 50 projects. Those projects directly engaged 6,000 fighters and 4,500 war-affected civilians. By utilizing civil reconstruction teams established by the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNDP completed 158 projects which focused on public works, including drainage clearance and road repairs, thus creating temporary jobs for 12,994 former fighters and civilians. A project executed by ILO and funded by the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office and UNDP, initiated short-term skills training for more than 2,000 combatants and civilians. The European Union was also very active through its 132 micro-projects which have provided short-term employment for 7,500 combatants and civilians.

25. To build upon the achievements of the bridging programme, the United Nations assisted the Liberian Government to develop medium-term to long-term reintegration projects as part of an economic rehabilitation and reconstruction programme. The United Nations Development Programme, through a project executed by the Department of Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat, provided critical support to the Minister of Planning in the establishment of a National Reintegration Steering Committee. The United Nations Development Programme mobilized and committed resources to reintegration, bridging and capacity-building activities amounting to US$ 13.4 million. As a capacity-building gesture, United Nations agencies, notably UNDP, FAO, WHO and ILO, provided institutional and logistical support to government agencies. In March-April 1997, a mission sent to Liberia by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) prepared a draft programme support document for the housing, infrastructural and service component of the national reintegration programme. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization also pledged to support post-conflict peace building activities in Liberia by conducting technical sectoral assessments in key agro-industrial fields.

3. Assistance to child soldiers in Liberia

26. As noted above, more than 4,300 child soldiers who had been under the control of the six major warring factions were demobilized. In order to address the problem of demobilizing and reintegrating child soldiers, the Demobilization and Reintegration Task Force established a special technical committee which was led by UNICEF. During the demobilization exercise, child soldiers were interviewed by specially trained UNICEF staff and, upon confirmation by those interviewers that they had been involved in the war, they were demobilized. At the end of the exercise, those children who knew the location of their parents

or guardians were immediately reunited with their families, while those who did not were cared for by non-governmental organizations in transit homes while efforts to trace their families continued. The overwhelming majority of the children (85 per cent) were reunited with their families and only 15 per cent were placed in transit homes.

27. As a follow-up exercise, UNICEF supported the War-Affected Youth Support (WAYS) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with food assistance from WFP. Under the project, Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) developed a community monitoring mechanism to identify former child combatants in local communities and place them in a WAYS project implemented by national non-governmental organizations. The WAYS project provides vocational skill and literacy training to former child combatants, as well as other war-affected children.

28. While the disarmament and demobilization exercise encountered numerous obstacles, the process was, on the whole, successful owing to the excellent cooperation among ECOMOG, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, donors and the Liberian Government. It is also a tribute to the sacrifice, patience and fortitude of the Liberian people. The bridging programme achieved its objectives and is now being followed up with medium-term to long-term reintegration programmes. The success of the process paved the way for national reconciliation and the subsequent elections on 19 July 1997.

IV. SECTORAL REVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

A. Food and nutrition

29. During the period under review, WFP distributed 38,000 metric tonnes of assorted food commodities to approximately 650,000 beneficiaries, including 250,000 residing in internally displaced and refugee camps in and around Monrovia and another 30,000 internally displaced and refugees located outside Monrovia. The main objective of the 1996 food aid strategy was to phase out general food distribution in Monrovia by mid-1996 and gradually shift to targeted interventions in order to create an environment conducive to the resettlement of internally displaced persons and returning refugees, and the reintegration of ex-fighters. Hence, after the crisis in April 1996, the food strategy concentrated on vulnerable groups, including malnourished children, the aged, the disabled, orphans and limited emergency school feeding and food-for-work activities aimed at maintaining essential emergency services.

30. In August and September 1996, WFP provided emergency food rations to vulnerable populations in Upper Margibi and Lower Bong counties where critical food shortages had been reported. Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) distributed over 1,605 metric tonnes of assorted food commodities, supplied by WFP, to a population of 90,929 persons in Upper Margibi and Upper Grand Bassa counties. As a result of those interventions, it was possible to avert a reoccurrence of severe malnutrition that had affected 50 per cent of children under five years of age in those areas in 1995. The Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran World Service also distributed

more than 127 metric tonnes of food to 11,000 affected persons in Upper Bong county.

31. The most notable success in the sector was achieved in early September 1996 when WFP and nutritional non-governmental organizations averted a looming disaster in western Liberia. When access to Tubmanburg was made possible after eight months of protracted siege, WFP and its national and international implementing partners swiftly moved in and set up a comprehensive programme to save the lives of several thousand starving and severely malnourished men, women and children.

32. In addition to the above-mentioned interventions, WFP and Catholic Relief Services continued to support, on a regular basis, institutional feeding to hospitals, clinics, leprosy rehabilitation centres and specialized feeding centres (therapeutic and supplementary programmes) in areas in which there were pockets of malnutrition. They also provided food for former child soldiers in transit centres run by Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and two national non-governmental organizations.

B. Agriculture

33. Since the resumption of its activities in Liberia in October 1996, FAO has continuously monitored the crop conditions and food supply situation in the country through its Global Information and Early Warning System. In December 1996, a FAO crop and food supply assessment mission was sent to Liberia to determine the estimates for crop production in 1996 and for food supply requirements for 1997. That information was made available to the international community, particularly key donor countries. The organization also continued to undertake comprehensive assessments of the input needed to produce food.

34. In addition, FAO effectively coordinated the planning and implementation of the distribution of agricultural input, mainly seeds and tools, to war-affected farmers. Resources contributed or mobilized by the European Union, USAID, UNDP, FAO, the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office and international non-governmental organizations were combined into consolidated distribution plans through the Seeds and Tools Committee which brought together the Ministry of Agriculture, donor agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations. The World Food Programme also supplied 2,100 metric tonnes of bulgur wheat as 'seed protection'. Together with similar input from Catholic Relief Services, that contribution was of significant assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons who were restarting farming life in their home communities along the border areas. Currently, FAO is facilitating the distribution of rice seeds and hand tools, at a cost of some US$ 2.5 million, to all 13 counties, benefiting approximately 120,000 farmers. Under the emergency relief project of its Technical Programme, FAO also distributed fishing gear to more than 2,000 fishermen.

35. Efforts were also made to install a food security monitoring mechanism. With the opening of the south-eastern counties, WFP and Catholic Relief Services moved quickly to position initial shipments of food stocks and vehicles in the region. Drawing from a broad technical base available within the humanitarian

community in Liberia, combined with the increased presence and reporting from health posts, the humanitarian community was able to receive and act on monitoring reports before malnutrition reached emergency levels.

C. Health and medical care

36. As in previous years, WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with national and international partners, provided support to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare for the provision of health and related services. The support provided by WHO was coordinated through the Health Services Committee which brought together all national and international agencies working in the health sector. Co-chaired by the Minister of Health and by WHO, the Committee played a critical role in the reactivation of health facilities in Monrovia which had been closed down during the fighting in April 1996.

37. Owing largely to the efforts of the Committee, an outbreak of cholera in August 1996 was successfully contained. To combat a recurrence of known epidemics, WHO assisted the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in the establishment of an early warning epidemiological surveillance system.

38. The World Health Organization was also active in developing health manpower resources. By providing support to training institutes that had survived the civil war, it was able in 1996 to complete the training of 17 physicians, 6 pharmacists and 32 middle-level health workers, including nurses, midwives, physicians' assistants and environmental health inspectors. It also provided support for the training of 394 medical staff from various health disciplines in two medical training establishments. At the community level, WHO established 138 community structures to train residents for health and sanitation teams. It also provided support for the training of 85 traditional birth attendants and midwives and provided them with working kits and materials to enhance safe maternity.

39. Since the end of disarmament, significant revitalization of the health care delivery system has taken place in the hinterland. The World Health Organization implemented a project for strengthening primary health care services and revitalizing community health units at county health facilities as well as training and redeploying health care providers in most of the counties. Together with UNICEF, World Vision International, Médecins du monde, the Liberia National Red Cross Society, Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Action internationale contre la faim, OXFAM and Medical Emergency Relief Cooperative International helped in the revitalization of health services and facilities (i.e., clinics and health posts) in areas not covered by WHO.

40. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Medical Emergency Relief Cooperative International, the United Nations Children's Fund revitalized 57 health facilities in five counties. It conducted capacity-building workshops for members of local county health teams and non-governmental organizations with which it implemented an expanded programme of immunization in all counties. It also collaborated with the European Union in providing the bulk of essential drugs and medical supplies to all non-profit health facilities

in the country through the National Drug Service. Health needs, however, remain a high priority given the significant portion of the population which still lacks access to even minimal services.

D. Water and sanitation

41. The United Nations Children's Fund was at the forefront of the response to the massive water and environmental sanitation hazards caused by the hostilities in April 1996. It expanded its water and sanitation activities, including the re-establishment of and support for health and hygiene educational activities in shelters for internally displaced persons, the construction of wells and latrines in shelters throughout Monrovia, the repair of handpumps, the resumption of latrine de-sludging and the trucking of water to emergency sites.

42. In the interior, UNICEF led the way in the installation of handpumps and the construction of pit latrines and in promoting effective sanitary methods for garbage disposal. Taking advantage of increased access gained to most of the country following the disarmament and demobilization exercise, UNICEF was able to provide many of the disarmament and demobilization sites with chlorination materials to enable trained demobilization staff to carry out the chlorination of wells. It also provided training in self-chlorination, handpump maintenance, hygiene and health education for community teams to enable them to carry out operation and maintenance of the facilities installed.

E. Education and training

43. In the educational sector, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in the revitalization of the educational system, including the rehabilitation of curriculum centres in five counties, the resumption of teacher training in educational methodology, the revision of the curriculum and the distribution of educational material. In that effort, it collaborated with the Ministry in the review of all textbooks for grades 1-6 of the Liberian educational system. The curriculum was reviewed by a team of Liberian specialists, and revised textbooks will be printed by UNICEF by means of a grant from the European Union.

44. Since October 1996, WFP, together with the Ministry of Education, has implemented an emergency school feeding programme which is aimed at providing support to schools that had been closed during the conflict. By June 1997, about 1,000 schools in nine counties had resumed classes and the number of beneficiaries was close to 250,000. The programme had a very positive impact on the enrolment of pupils and students, particularly girls. The food-for-work component was in many cases the only incentive or payment in lieu of salaries for the teachers and support staff. Preparations are under way to ensure that more schools qualify for the scheme by the end of 1997.

45. Efforts are also under way to address the long-term needs of the demobilized combatants, 56 per cent of whom, both children and adults, have expressed a desire to go back to school. To meet that demand and to lay the foundation for the revitalization of the educational system, UNICEF began work to reopen 160 rural primary schools.

46. Under its Modules of Employable Skills programme, ILO has been engaged in promoting short-cycle skills training in the rural areas of Liberia, primarily focusing on former combatants and other war-affected citizens. The programme was designed to take the training to the trainee, in concert with the WFP feeding programme. The training programme subcontracted local training providers and produced 1,700 graduates.

F. Specific target groups

1. Liberian refugees and returnees

47. It is estimated that there are 665,000 Liberian refugees in countries of asylum in the West African subregion. With the improved security situation in Liberia and the deployment of ECOMOG throughout the country, refugees have begun to return home. In order to support that effort, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) updated its plan of operation for the repatriation and reintegration of the Liberian refugees. Under phase I, it has facilitated the return of 1,179 Liberian refugees from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. In addition to providing transport, UNHCR grants returnees US$ 30 per head of family and US$ 15 per dependant.

48. Under phase II of the plan of operation, which involves a large-scale repatriation and reintegration programme for Liberia, UNHCR will take into account such factors as the security situation and logistical constraints imposed by the rainy season, as well as the wish expressed by some refugees to return only after the end of the school year and the time of harvest. To cope better with increased activities related to the protection and monitoring of refugees in both phases, UNHCR will, in the near future, establish field offices in Vahun, Gbarnga, Voinjama, Zwedru and Harper. Currently, UNHCR carries out field missions to various areas of refugee settlement and return on a regular basis in order to identify the areas and sectors that require immediate attention.

2. Sierra Leonean refugees

49. Prior to the military coup in Sierra Leone on 25 May 1997, there were an estimated 120,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia; UNHCR provided care and maintenance for an estimated 30,000 of them, in five refugee sites in Monrovia. By mid-May 1997, UNHCR had facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 1,837 Sierra Leonean refugees. The operation was, however, suspended after the military coup in Sierra Leone. In collaboration with the Government of Liberia, other operational United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees responded to the needs of the estimated 7,000 new Sierra Leonean asylum seekers who fled the recent hostilities in the south-eastern part of Sierra Leone. Most of the new refugees are in Grand Cape Mount and lower Lofa counties.

3. Internally displaced persons

50. Since the issuance of the previous report of the Secretary-General, the activities of the humanitarian community have been focused on efforts to maintain services to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Liberians and Sierra Leonean refugees. It is estimated that some 750,000 Liberians are internally displaced. While a large number are in shelters, many more remain displaced in towns and villages throughout the country.

51. During the past year, three key tasks have preoccupied the humanitarian community in Liberia. First, the construction of regular shelters was undertaken in cooperation with the government authorities in order to relocate tens of thousands of persons crammed into temporary shelters. Second, various incentives were offered to support efforts to return displaced persons to their original homes. Even as those measures were being taken, reception sites were organized for new influxes of persons fleeing continued fighting. Third, consultations on long-term issues of displacement, such as resettlement, were initiated with suggestions, inter alia, for the organization of a resettlement planning body and an offer to build local capacity.

52. It is encouraging to note that a modest voluntary and unassisted resettlement of internally displaced persons has occurred throughout Liberia since August 1996. This was possible because of the steady improvement in security in rural areas, following the demobilization exercise and the expansion of ECOMOG deployment into the rural areas of the counties. Returning persons were, however, confronted with the massive destruction of residential structures, roads and bridges as well as the unauthorized occupation of properties during their absence.

53. Even though improved security conditions made population returns possible, some displaced persons continued to wait for final clarification of the political situation before returning home. Furthermore, the material preparation for comprehensive resettlement has yet to be put in place. The international community has proposed a number of initiatives in this regard, which are under consideration by the Government.

4. Gender issues

54. While women in Liberia continue to bear disproportionately the effects of the war, the United Nations system has been working to improve their situation through the provision of support to women's groups and organizations. For example, UNICEF has been active in training women leaders in high-risk communities as trainers in sanitation through health education, information on breastfeeding, diarrhoea prevention, home treatment and disease surveillance.

55. The economic empowerment of women is actively pursued by providing poor and war-affected women with access to the financial means for self-employment. The Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office made available US$ 200,000 for a micro-credit project run by the Department of Development Support and Management Services. It also funded a FAO project that trained 100 women in improved fishing and marketing practices. Other projects funded by the Humanitarian

Assistance Coordination Office and implemented by national non-governmental organizations and women's organizations included the provision of support to a women's self-help and day care centre, a training course in tailoring and knitting skills for mothers and ex-combatant women, and a local venture in crop farming and livestock raising.

V. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

56. The crisis in April 1996 had a severe impact on the community of non-governmental organizations in Liberia. Confronted with the challenge of increased humanitarian work against a background of massive looting of resources and reduced staffing levels, the international non-governmental organizations produced a statement on limited operations, which formed the basis of a joint policy of operation for the humanitarian community at large. Incorporating a number of "smart" aid principles, the main thrust of the joint policy was that humanitarian intervention should not, directly or indirectly, produce harmful effects on those it is intended to benefit.

57. Some non-governmental organizations expanded services to the rural communities. The number of international non-governmental organizations grew to 20 as new ones arrived throughout the year. A notable development in the activities of non-governmental organizations in Liberia during the year was the diversification of interventions and the widening of geographical coverage. Many non-governmental organizations commenced their activities in one or two sectors and subsequently moved to multiple sectors in order to address critical gaps and the unmet needs of the communities targeted.

58. International non-governmental organizations which had been engaged in multisectoral interventions were quick to move to outlying areas as the security conditions improved. In the nutritional and health sector, non-governmental organizations with long experience in Liberia continued to maintain a significant presence while newly arrived ones sought innovative niches for intervention, such as the operation of mobile health care to reach out to returning rural populations.

59. Several non-governmental organizations were key partners in the demobilization and reintegration of combatants. Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and its national partners, Children's Assistance Programme and Don Bosco, provided counselling for demobilized child fighters and arranged for their reunion with their families. The International Rescue Committee, OXFAM, World Vision International and the Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran World Service, along with numerous national non-governmental organizations, executed and implemented bridging projects with funds received from the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office.

60. Credible Liberian national non-governmental organizations have grown not only in number but also in terms of their contribution to the humanitarian effort. They have been utilized by WFP, UNICEF, UNDP and the United Nations Office for Project Services in their respective programmes, while the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office has engaged them to implement many bridging projects.

VI. ASSISTANCE BY MEMBER STATES AND OTHER DONORS

61. The United Nations consolidated inter-agency appeal covering the period September 1995 to August 1996, which was extended to 31 December 1996, sought US$ 114,593,853 in funds, of which US$ 89,314,840 was received in pledges and contributions. Another consolidated inter-agency appeal was launched in December 1996, covering the period 1 January-30 June 1997. That appeal sought US$ 31.2 million but, given the paucity of contributions and the need to await clarification of the situation in Liberia, the appeal was subsequently extended to run through 31 December 1997. As at July 1997, only US$ 7,588,561 had been received in pledges and contributions. The appeal was accompanied by and linked to the United Nations system's inter-agency programme for community reintegration and peace-building, which is coordinated by UNDP and covers the period 1 January-31 December 1997. The programme sought US$ 60.6 million; the response, however, has been very poor.

62. The international community made significant contributions to ECOMOG and provided valuable support for the electoral process. On 2 June 1997, the Secretary-General invited Member States and other donors to provide information on assistance extended to Liberia within the framework of General Assembly resolution 51/30 B. The replies received from six States are summarized below.

People's Republic of China

63. China provided 500 tons of rice and 5,000 mini transistor radios.

Ireland

64. In 1996, Ireland provided £Ir 450,000 for emergency food and medical aid.

Italy

65. Italy contributed to humanitarian assistance in Liberia by supporting a humanitarian flight, from the United Nations depot at Pisa, of high protein biscuits costing US$ 75,000 for Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone. It also contributed US$ 400,000 to UNHCR for emergency operations for Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire.

Sweden

66. During the period June 1995-June 1997, Sweden provided rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance to Liberia, inter alia, in the areas of refugee repatriation, care of refugees and internally displaced persons, health care, coordination, food and education. Assistance provided during the two-year period totalled SKr 73 million, with assistance from January to June 1997 amounting to SKr 23.5 million. The main recipients were UNHCR, FAO, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and a number of Swedish and international non-governmental organizations.

Switzerland

67. In 1995, Switzerland provided humanitarian assistance to Liberia totalling SwF 3,530,709. The figure for 1996 was SwF 2,395,149.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

68. Since 1 April 1996, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has contributed approximately £2 million in humanitarian assistance to Liberia. The funds were committed to the following organizations: UNICEF, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Action internationale contre la faim, Merlin, Save the Children Fund (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and the Tear Fund.

VII. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

69. The humanitarian situation in Liberia has substantially improved since the issuance of the previous report (A/51/303). The peace process is on course. The guns have fallen silent. For the first time in their 150-year history as an independent nation, Liberians on 19 July 1997 voted for their presidential and legislative representatives in internationally supervised and generally free and fair elections. The newly elected Government, headed by Charles Ghankay Taylor and the National Patriotic Party, was sworn into office on 2 August 1997.

70. Much credit must be given to subregional diplomacy and political leverage backed by military force. However, the collective efforts of the humanitarian assistance community in terms of humanitarian diplomacy, advocacy and relief work also made significant contributions. Bereft of their resources which were looted or destroyed repeatedly during the civil war, the United Nations and its partners in the humanitarian community persevered in supporting the war-affected people of Liberia. The exposure of humans held near-hostage in Suehn, the containment of cholera and measles outbreaks in Monrovia and elsewhere, the halt to the mass starvation in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties, the concerted humanitarian advocacy to pressure factions to allow assistance to reach the needy and the successful efforts of the humanitarian assistance community to demobilize and reintegrate the former combatants, are some of the critical contributions of the humanitarian community in Liberia during the past year.

71. Positive developments in the political realm pose new challenges to the humanitarian community. Areas which were inaccessible for security reasons have now become open for humanitarian work. In the future, humanitarian assistance activities will increasingly focus on facilitating the voluntary return and resettlement of the internally displaced and Liberian refugees. The United Nations and its partners are also working to fully reintegrate the participants in the war into civil society, based on their declared wishes and desires. Expectations, for such positive developments must, however, be balanced against the deterioration of the situation in Sierra Leone and its possible repercussions for Liberia.

72. It is envisaged that relief work will need to continue for some time in order to meet the remaining needs of vulnerable groups throughout the country.

It is reassuring to note that the humanitarian assistance community has started to redirect its efforts to the challenging task of supporting the efforts of the Liberian Government in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the economic, social and institutional coping mechanisms of the Liberian people.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the Security Council, Fifty-first Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1996, document S/1996/679, annex and Corr.1.

[2] Official Records of the Security Council, Fiftieth Year, Supplement for July, August and September 1995, document S/1995/742.